

**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Development,
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their
Destruction**

19 July 2018

English only

2018 Meeting
Geneva, 4-7 December 2018

Meeting of Experts on Strengthening National Implementation
Geneva, 13 August 2018
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Various ways to promote transparency and confidence building
under the Convention

**Building Confidence in Compliance: Peer Review
Transparency Exercise at the Richard Lugar
Center for Public Health Research (CPHR) of the
National Center for Disease Control and Public
Health (NCDC) in Tbilisi, Georgia**

Submitted by Georgia, co-sponsored by Germany

I. Introduction

1. The success or failure of disarmament regimes depends on the actions of their respective States Parties, which need to cultivate these regimes and ensure their continued relevance in changing scientific and political contexts. Since the Fifth Review Conference in 2001, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) has seen three intersessional processes that have generated valuable ideas on possible steps to increase confidence in compliance, but have fallen short of more ambitious expectations. In this context, peer review activities, while neither a substitute for verification nor comparable with a compliance mechanism, may help boost confidence in States Parties' compliance with and commitment to the BTWC.

2. At the Seventh Review Conference in 2011, a working paper submitted by France proposed the idea of developing peer review activities "to provide for an assessment of the implementation of the Convention, thereby bolstering confidence among States Parties"¹. Since then, the practical benefits of peer review activities in the context of the Convention

¹ BWC/CONF.VII/WP.28

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have been repeatedly explored, as 14 countries have hosted such exercises. They have also been presented in numerous additional working papers, such as the one submitted by Germany to the 2016 Eighth Review Conference and co-sponsored by 13 countries from all three regional groups.

3. The transparent demonstration of national implementation of the BTWC enhances confidence in compliance with the BTWC. The possibility of conducting on-site visits represents just one of various forms in which peer reviews can contribute to this objective. Yet, they serve as a connection between the theoretical discourse on implementation and concrete every-day procedures on BTWC-relevant sites. Following the German exercise in 2016 and the peer review exercise hosted by the Kingdom of Morocco in 2017, Georgia has therefore decided to host a similar visit at the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research (CPHR) of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) in Tbilisi.

4. Like the previous exercises, this third on-site exercise, to which all States Parties to the BTWC will be invited, is intended to demonstrate that it is possible to reconcile a high level of transparency with the legitimate security and intellectual property interests of the visited facility. It is thus expected that it will represent a valuable contribution to the ongoing search for innovative and concrete ways to increase confidence in the implementation of the BTWC in the absence of a compliance mechanism.

II. The Peer Review Exercise at the NCDC Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research

5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia has decided to carry out a peer review transparency exercise at the NCDC Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research in Tbilisi, Georgia in order to strengthen confidence in compliance with the provisions of the BTWC. All interested States Parties to the BTWC are invited to apply for participation in this exercise planned for November 14 – 15, 2018.

6. The NCDC CPHR is a civilian facility working with BTWC-relevant pathogens and declared under the Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) submitted by Georgia. It is the first BSL3 laboratory established in the region as the result of the initiative of the US Senator Richard Lugar and serves both Georgia and the wider region. It offers detection and diagnostic capacities in regards to endemic and exotic diseases, like Dengue or Chikungunya, and is equipped to conduct bio-surveillance on natural foci – Tularemia, Anthrax and other zoonotic diseases.

7. Unfortunately, for capacity reasons, a maximum of 20 visitors can be accommodated. To ensure equal representation, these places will be filled with participants from all regional groups. Financial support for travel and accommodation will be provided upon request by the German Federal Foreign Office, thus ensuring a non-discriminatory approach. The only prerequisite stipulated in the invitation will be that participants must be willing to comply with the appropriate safety regulations for entering biological laboratories.

8. The visit will include a tour of the facility, a visit to the laboratories, conversations with staff in the laboratories, presentations and discussions of research activities, and an assessment meeting. For operational reasons, the visitors will be split into two teams of ten individuals each, which will both complete the same tour. The visit will be concluded by a closing session including further discussions, a summary, and a final assessment. The working language of the visit will be English.

9. All teams will be escorted on site and will be able to assess all aspects of the facility that are relevant to provisions of the BTWC and provided on the CBM form, comprising laboratory activities and equipment, infrastructure, security measures including access control, laboratory conduct, documentation in relation to research and development, including Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC), as well as procedures for the transfer and export of pathogens and toxins.

10. Exercise proceedings will allow for:

- examination of rooms, laboratory equipment and installations;
 - requests for visual access to paper documents;
 - requests for written answers to questions that were submitted in writing prior to the visit;
 - interviewing of personnel;
 - requests for photographs and the determination of geographical coordinates.
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